

Russia Starts Census Amid Pandemic, Demographic Crisis

By [AFP](#)

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Russia's population statistics will be closely watched for signs of the human cost of the pandemic.

Donat Sorokin / TASS

Russia on Friday launched a population census delayed several times by the coronavirus pandemic that has exacerbated the country's worsening demographic crisis.

Russia's population has been in near-constant decline since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, due to a low birth rate, an under-resourced healthcare system, and emigration.

The coronavirus pandemic, which has killed at least 400,000 people in Russia according to the national statistic agency Rosstat, has seriously aggravated the problem.

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In 2020, the population shrank by 510,000 people — the sharpest decline in 15 years, Rosstat

calculated.

It found that the population, which numbered 146.2 million as of January 1, declined by another 595,000 people by the end of August.

Russia has also seen its birth rate stagnate as the mortality rate spikes, Rosstat data shows.

The country is seeing falling birth rates because the generation becoming parents now were born in the 1990s, when the birthrate fell drastically due to economic uncertainties.

President Vladimir Putin, who has pointed to poverty as a key factor in limiting family size, has over the years announced a litany of financial incentives to encourage Russians to have more children to boost the population.

The census comes as Russia is seeing a surge in coronavirus infections.

This week the country set a pandemic high for both cases and deaths as Russia's job drive stalls and a lack of strict restrictions allow the virus to spread unchecked.

To help limit the spread, much of the census will be conducted online, while workers will be regularly tested for the virus, Rosstat said.

Russia has conducted two previous census counts since the fall of the Soviet Union, in 2010 and 2002.

One of the only times Russia's population has grown in the years since the Soviet collapse was in 2014, when Moscow annexed Crimea from Ukraine, adding more than 2.5 million people.

The census will run until November 14 and preliminary population figures are expected in April.

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